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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 003118

SIPDIS

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF AND AF/E

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/27/2016

TAGS: PGOV PHUM ET

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: DETAINEES NOW SEEK COMPROMISE WITH PM  
MELES

Classified By: PAO ANTHONY FISHER FOR REASON: 1.4 (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: Mission's efforts to broker an agreement between the GOE and the imprisoned CUD leaders have begun to show positive results. There appears to be a greater willingness to compromise on both sides. Meditation efforts have resulted in the beginning of earnest negotiations between the jailed CUD leaders and the GOE, aimed at crafting a political settlement before the end of the trial. End summary.

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Untying the Gordian Knot of Mistrust.  
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¶2. (C) Mission initiated efforts during the past 11 months have begun to show concrete signs of progress towards getting both the GOE and the jailed CUD leaders to arrive at a compromise, so as to defuse political tensions in Ethiopia. On November 18, a briefing on the five key demands (below) of the GOE and the detained, was given by the then Charge d'Affaires, Ambassador Vicki Huddleston and the PAO, to mission selected Ethiopian intermediaries (strictly protect), Professor Efraim Isaac, a confidant of Prime Minister Meles, and Pastor Daniel Gebreselassie, Head of the NGO, Prison Fellowship - Justice for All:

-- Each of the parties agree to stop speaking about each other in less than flattering terms in the government media, international press and internet web-sites.

-- The law presumes everyone is innocent until proven guilty. The incarcerated that may be found guilty, and eventually receive pardon, should promise to refrain from insisting on their innocence upon their release.

-- Each of the parties recognize that democracy is a process and that in attempting to construct democracy in Ethiopia, it is natural that mistakes have been made, however each side agrees to work towards building a strong and united Ethiopia.

-- The opposition should agree to work within the constitution to promote peaceful political change and disavow the resort to civil disobedience such as street actions, to resolve differences with the majority party.

-- The opposition should express a willingness to help heal the nation. They should appeal to all Ethiopians to peacefully reduce political tensions, and counteract the Jihadist threat to Ethiopia, so as to guarantee the continued survival of hundreds of years of peaceful co-existence

between Christians and Muslims. The ruling party will give them time on national media to make their appeal.

Professor Ephraim and Pastor Daniel are respected by the government and trusted by the detainees. The intermediaries were charged with telling the CUD leaders that the GOE was serious about negotiating a pardon with them, and were asked to assess the leaders' general predisposition to fashion a compromise.

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A Major Step Forward  
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¶3. (S) On November 23 Ambassador Yamamoto and the PAO met with both interlocutors to debrief them after they had made several trips to the CUD leaders in Kaliti prison, to review tactics and language that could further approximation between the GOE and the CUD detainees. According to both Prof. Ephraim and Pastor Daniel, Hailu Shawel, Prof. Mesfin Woldemariam, Bertukan Medeska, Berhanu Nega, and the consistently moderate, Yacob Hailemariam, approved in principle the five points previously discussed with the Charge, and all displayed a marked disposition to compromise with the government. They subsequently became involved in making their own proposals to the GOE. In subsequent meetings between PM Meles and Prof. Ephraim at which the latter reported on the key points of interest expressed in various meetings with the CUD, the Prime Minister said that he wanted to meet the CUD halfway, and was drafting four GOE proposals for them, one of which included the GOE's willingness to express regret. Expressions of remorse is a key requisite of both the GOE and the CUD at this point. The CUD imprisoned

ADDIS ABAB 00003118 002 OF 002

leaders and the GOE are now seriously negotiating an agreement which could eventually lead to a political settlement, perhaps prior to the end of the trial.

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Comment  
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¶4. (C) Key preconditions to reconciliation, important to both the GOE and the imprisoned CUD leaders, are now being earnestly negotiated by both parties for the first time since the mission initiated discussions regarding the release of the detainees. A final agreement, which may still be at least several weeks in the offing, could include a mix of reduction in sentences and pardons for the CUD leaders, and even dropping of charges, for which there is precedent under Ethiopian law. A political settlement is now seen by both sides as a necessary preamble to the end of the trial, and is a welcome advance. The Mission has adopted the tactic of working with trusted Ethiopian intermediaries, a traditional mode of dispute resolution, designed to save face on both sides. Post remains deeply engaged in the process behind the scenes, to assist with long-term reconciliation prospects as an 'Ethiopian solution to Ethiopian problems' is crafted.

End comment  
YAMAMOTO